



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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President Shelly signs Executive Order No. 09-2014

Also meets with FEMA Region VI Federal Coordinating Officer Nancy Casper



On Jan. 6, 2014, Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly signed Executive Order No. 09-2014, which provides policies and procedures to administer FEMA grants and projects. Navajo Nation Department of Emergency Management, FEMA and the Public Health Emergency Preparedness Program joined President Shelly for the signing ceremony in Window Rock. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

On Jan. 15, 2014, Nancy Casper, federal coordinating officer for FEMA Region VI and the New Mexico disaster and public assistance team met with Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly.

The FCO cadre is currently conducting site visits across the Nation for damages from the monsoon of 2013 and scheduling training for FEMA-sponsored classes.

The visit came a week after President Shelly signed Executive Order No. 09-2014 into law on Jan. 6. The executive order provides policies and procedures to administer grants and projects from FEMA.

President Shelly said, "This executive order will streamline the process for the Navajo Nation and FEMA to respond to emergencies quickly and efficiently."

The order mandates internal policies that will govern FEMA grants awarded to the Nation as the grantee. Additionally, the Navajo

Nation may also be designated as a sub-grantee of FEMA grants awarded to Arizona, New Mexico and Utah.

"These policies and procedures are not only instrumental for the Nation to administer FEMA grants, but they also strengthen our ability to work with the states during times of disasters," President Shelly said.

"The executive order assists with our rollout of new policies and procedures that will get the FEMA funds to chapters and programs a lot faster than previous years," said Rose Whitehair, director for the Navajo Nation Department of Emergency Management.

"For Indian Country, we need emergency managers and trained personnel in the worst way," she said.

FEMA personnel from the national level have been on the Navajo Nation for weeks now identifying New Mexico chapters that incurred damage from the summer monsoons.

The need for Navajo-speaking emergency coordinators is legitimate, especially at the chapter level for communication purposes. Beyond the obvious interaction considerations, trained tribal personnel are also needed to provide appropriate cultural sensitivity during emergency situations.

“This is an opportunity for us to do the right thing,” said George Kelly Casias, FEMA Tribal Liaison assigned to the Navajo Nation.

Casias has been on the Nation assisting Whitehair with project worksheet development for chapters walloped by the 2013 monsoon. The storms resulted in major flooding in 86 of the 110 chapters on the Navajo Nation.

He noted that the worksheets detailed the community, the county in which the incident occurred, extent of damages, and the number of families that were affected.

“We are trained to deal with disasters,” Whitehair said. “When bad things happen, they call us. It’s our passion to be here to help our people.”

She explained that every disaster occurrence is given a number by FEMA.

DR-4148 is for disaster flooding between July 23 to 28, 2013. DR-4152 reported on flooding from Sept. 9 to 22, which hit some communities three times.

The new executive order provides policies and procedures for payout of disaster funds for NNDEM, which was previously guided by the Mechanism of Instruction and through advice and counsel from Office of the Controller, Office of Management and Budget, Department of Justice and Office of the President and Vice President

Whitehair said the guidelines follow the framework of the MOI and allows pass-through funding of FEMA grants.

FEMA’s public assistance money is based on cost estimates from chapters, which the agency determines is qualified or not qualified for 75 percent reimbursement for costs incurred during the disaster emergency.

“Public assistance funding is for roads, buildings, playgrounds and other infrastructure the Navajo Nation is responsible for,” Whitehair said.

There were a lot of the problems with the old system, she said, such as overpayments to chapters, wrong account and project numbers, and improper reimbursements.

NNDEM had roughly \$11 million in funding, the majority of which passed through the department to chapters and programs on the Nation.

“We help all the agencies to turn in their proper documentation. We go out there (to the chapters), look at the site, document the site damages and write a cost estimate,” Whitehair said.

The cost estimates are detailed in a project worksheet, which specifies the disaster, description of damages, and the necessary scope of work to return the site to pre-disaster conditions.

Chapters are encouraged to take photos of the damage during the disaster and after conditions are restored to normal conditions.

“The policies and procedures are going to make this process a lot smoother and faster for the chapters and programs. We’re excited about this,” Whitehair said.



On Jan. 15, 2014, FEMA Federal Coordinating Officer for Region VI, Nancy Casper and the New Mexico disaster and public assistance team met with President Shelly. The FCO cadre discussed site visits and training across the Navajo Nation. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



President Shelly speaks to officials from the Federal Emergency Management Agency for Region VI about disaster emergencies on the Navajo Nation.. (Photo by Rick Abasta)